

Visual Preference Survey



sum 172 mode 1 mean 0.37



sum 323 mode 2 mean 0.70



sum 633 mode 3 mean 1.38



Credit | EDAW Inc



Source: <http://technologyworth.wordpress.com/>



TOOL DESCRIPTION

A visual preference survey ascertains and quantifies public perceptions of the visual quality of urban design. A straightforward and proven method for conducting a visual preference survey involves showing a series of photos and asking participants to rate them on a fixed scale. The following sections describe relevant considerations regarding the type of the content and the design of the survey instrument when employing this kind of surveying technique.

Visual Preference Survey Content

The central challenge in conducting a visual preference survey is selecting a manageable number of elements to test in a manner which introduces as few outside variables as possible. A visual preference survey should test preferences for specific design elements (e.g., configurations of shade trees, parking, or lighting, street furniture), variations of building form configurations, or architectural styles within a single general urban/suburban form typology. While it is tempting to use a single survey to test all possible design elements and configurations, a survey that tests too many variables will produce unreliable and unusable results.

Survey Photo Selection

To understand the elements that influence visual preference, only one element should be tested in any given photo. Measuring preferences for one element or configuration over others is done by using two or more versions of the same photograph with a single element changed. This means the survey consists of a series of “before/after” or “either/or” photos. By randomizing photo order and ensuring that no pairings are shown back to back, this method eliminates other variables from affecting preference ratings and elicits accurate participant responses.

A visual preference survey with a series of photos intended to test, for example, preference for street lamp styles, should not employ photographs of lamps from different locations and contexts, as it would introduce other visual variables. Consequently, the results could not be relied upon as wholly indicative of preference for a particular lamp.

Tool Intent

The Visual Preference Survey is intended to engage the public in developing community designs by measuring preferences for specific design scenarios and urban design elements.

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USERS

Municipal Officials

- ✓ Municipal Planning Staff
- ✓ Planning + Design Professionals
- Engineers
- ✓ Land Developers
- Landowners
- Community Members

Survey Photo Quality and Composition

The quality and composition of the photos used to test visual preference are important. Photos should show elements from typical perspectives, i.e., the sidewalk or the street. As actual photos of different elements as built would not likely be available for a new development, photo-realistic two-dimensional renderings or three-dimensional models are needed. Such visualizations or renderings must provide a convincing illustration that allows survey participants to accurately indicate their preferences, but should not provide an overly artistic expression of a design element that influences the rating with unrelated preferences for visual graphic design.

Visual Preference Survey Design and Distribution

Survey design and distribution methods can affect responses by participants. Best practices and research suggest ways to maximize the reliability of responses through survey design.

Prompts

Prompts can instruct participants on the criteria they should use to rate the photographs. At the beginning of the survey, a simple and short explanation of the intent and purpose of the survey is provided so the criteria are consistent and valid. A short form prompt, such as a single sentence reminding participants of the rating criteria, can be included on slides of photos. To avoid asking participants to introduce other value judgements in responses about visual preference (such as monetary or ecological considerations), these prompts should be value neutral in other respects.

Rating System

The subjective assessment of the survey participants must be captured in a quantifiable form. A Likert scale rating system allows participants to rate photos in a straightforward manner, while capturing nuanced perceptions of what scenic quality entails. Descriptive labels for the rating scale should be consistent with survey prompts. A 7-point scale from -3 (very unattractive) to +3 (very attractive), with a neutral value at zero, is sufficient for a preference survey about the scenic quality of photos.

Calibration Photos and Image Randomization

A survey should be designed to minimize the effects of presentation order on the preferences for images relative to one another. There are two ways to address this concern.

First, calibration photos from the full range photos should be presented at the beginning of the survey. Participants will be able to rate these photos, and this will ensure that they understand how they images may be rated relative to one another. However, these photos are not included in the analysis of results.

Second, survey images can be presented in a random order for each participant. By randomizing this order, the effects of extremely attractive or extremely unattractive photos on the pattern of ratings can be effectively balanced across the entire sample.

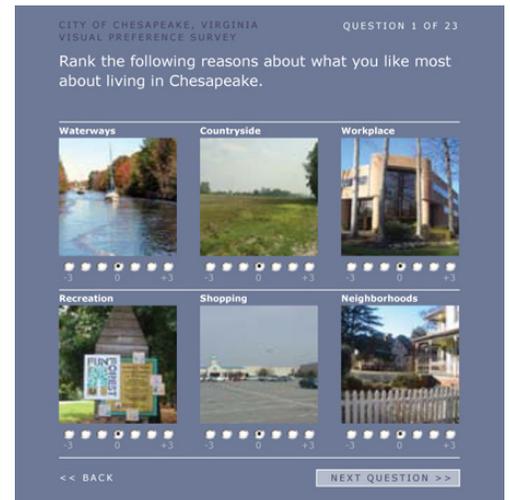
Survey Length

A survey should be designed to take a maximum of 10-15 minutes to complete. The number of slides and complexity of questions asked will influence the time a survey takes to complete. Care should be taken to frame the survey in a straightforward way and provide simple prompts. Concise and direct surveys can reduce dropout rates and improve the overall quality of the results.

CASE STUDIES | BEST PRACTICES

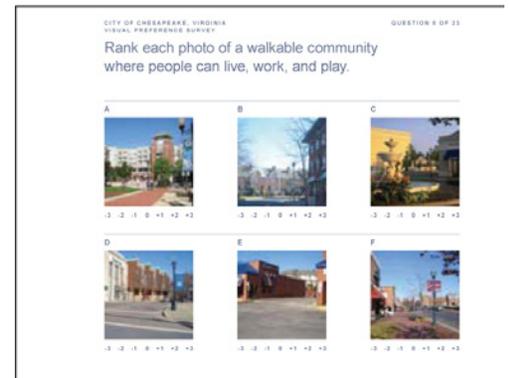
City of Chesapeake, Virginia – Design Guidelines Visual Preference Survey

The City of Chesapeake, Virginia in the U.S., employed a visual preference survey to inform the development of urban design guidelines. It provides a good example of how to test preferences for a variety of urban and landscape design elements. Questions prompted participants to indicate visual preferences for specific elements, rather than asking for general reactions (as is often common with these kinds of surveys). Photos employed in each question use similar styles of photographic composition and show design elements at similar scales.



The online version of the survey guided users through 23 questions using “radio-butt ons” to rank each photo.

Credit | EDAAW Inc.



The survey was available at public libraries as printed handouts for those without internet access or preferring to complete the survey with pen and paper.

Credit | EDAAW Inc.

Visual Preference Survey

Sampling

Research suggests that there is a difference between public and expert perceptions of design. Undoubtedly, both perspectives offer something to the process and input from both should be included. If the visual preference survey is to be truly a measure of public visual preference, it should rely on a representative sample of the population. The survey should absolutely include, however, neighbors of the development and stakeholders, to inform the design based on the preferences of those with the most at stake over the long term with the final product.

WHEN IN THE PROCESS IS IT USED?

The visual preference survey is a public engagement tool for informing design and as such should be used at the beginning of the project.



Source | http://www.municipaldevelopmentgroup.com/win09_006.pdf

LOCAL APPLICATIONS

Visual Preference Survey, Alberta Tourism, Parks, and Recreation

The Government of Alberta Department of Tourism, Parks, and Recreation, has developed a visual preference survey methodology for assessing preferences for scenic recreation and tourism landscapes. The same surveying techniques can be easily adapted to assess visual preference for urban or suburban form, design elements, and configurations.



Credit | O2 Planning + Design Inc.

RELATED TOOLS

Visualizations

Charrette

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration/Federal Transportation Administration. "Visual Preference Surveys." Chapter 4, Section C – Finding New Ways to Communicate in Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision Making. August 2002. (http://www.planning.dot.gov/PublicInvolvement/pi_documents/4c-g.asp | Accessed 22 June 2011).

Alberta Tourism, Parks, and Recreation. "Chapter 1: Visual Preference Survey." In Scenic Resource Assessment of the North Saskatchewan Region. O2 Planning + Design Inc.: February 2011.

City of Chesapeake. Design Guidelines and Visual Preference Survey (http://www.chesapeake.va.us/services/depart/planning/pdf/design-guidelines/DesignGuidelines_060517_ResultsSummary.pdf)